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Coping with Loneliness – A Resource for Older Adults

Community Tools

2019

Coping with Loneliness – A Resource for Older Adults

Sheridan Centre for Elder Research

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SOURCE Citation

Sheridan Centre for Elder Research, "Coping with Loneliness – A Resource for Older Adults" (2019). *Coping with Loneliness – A Resource for Older Adults*. 1.
https://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_building_connected_communities_tools_coping/1

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Building Connected Communities:
**Coping with Loneliness:
A Resource for Older Adults**



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the Toolkit visit:
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Overview

We all feel lonely sometimes. Whether it is for days, weeks, months or years, feeling lonely can be difficult to cope with. An important first step to coping with loneliness is recognizing that loneliness is a **normal human emotion** that we all feel at one time or another.

Since loneliness is such a personal experience, it can be useful to consider the causes as well as some possible solutions. This technique is called self-reflection. We hope this resource helps you to self-reflect.

This resource might be right for you if:

- You recognize that you are lonely
- You have tried to address your feelings of loneliness, with or without success
- You are comfortable thinking about your life (i.e. reflecting on the past and planning for the future)

This resource includes:

- Information about loneliness
- Activities to help you think about how you are feeling
- Personal reflections
- Resources/services in Peel and Halton Regions

Remember: It is okay to ask for help.

If you grow more concerned about your loneliness speak to your doctor or another qualified professional.

01

Rate Your Loneliness

Feelings of loneliness can come and go or they can be constant and long-standing. Either way, it can be valuable to understand how strong your feelings are and to see how they change over time.

Look at the faces, which one matches how you are feeling right now?



**I feel lonely all
the time**



**I feel lonely
some of the time**



**I never feel
lonely**

Tip: You can use these faces like a measuring tool, to track how lonely you feel from day to day.

- Some people experience loneliness that comes and goes
- Others experience long-term loneliness that never seems to go away
- Some people feel lonely even when they are surrounded by friends
- Others feel lonely because they live alone and are socially isolated



In Canada, my life is lonely. I decided to live here in Canada because my only child lives here. I wish I can find more social activities in Canada, especially on weekdays.

-Participant 1

I don't prefer to live a long time in Canada. I feel lonely and restricted in many ways.

-Participant 2

When I was in China, I had more acquaintances in my neighborhood that I played chess with. I used to socialize more, but things are different here so I socialize less (i.e. take care of grandchildren most of the time and have housework to do).

-Participant 3

I would like to go out into the community, but can't find places and can't bear the cost of transportation.

-Participant 4



These are just a few examples of what loneliness can look like as described by older adults who spoke with the research team about their experiences.

02

Think about Situations Contributing to Your Feelings

Sometimes we feel a certain way because of a particular situation. Certain situations can become barriers to us enjoying the social life we want. Identifying our feelings in these situations can be a first step in finding some solutions.

Check (✓) the situations that apply to your life.

I lost my spouse/family member/ friend		I do not know where to go for activities	
I moved into a new home/ neighbourhood		I do not have enough money	
I have problems with my health		I cannot see or hear well	
I cannot communicate in English		It is difficult for me to get around	
I do not have technology		I do not have transportation	
I live alone		I do not have family or friends living close by	
I don't know		Other:	

How do those situations make you feel?

**If you can't change the situation, can you change how you feel about it?
How might you accomplish that?**

Tip: If the last question is too difficult to answer, try the other exercises and come back to this page later.

03

Consider How Your Thoughts Might Contribute to Your Feelings

Sometimes, we cannot change the situations we are in and we find it difficult to change our feelings as well. Another approach is to try to change our negative thoughts into more positive ones. Sometimes just **changing the way we think** can help us to feel better.

Which thoughts might be affecting how you feel? Check (✓) the ones that apply to you, or, write your own.

Sometimes I think...

People don't want to talk to me		I don't trust people	
I can't make new friends		No one understands me	
I will be alone forever		I can't rely on other people	
No one cares		I am not social	
I have nothing to contribute		I can't go out	
Relationships aren't for me		My opinions and thoughts do not matter	
I am unlovable		I sometimes feel invisible	
I don't know		Other:	

To change some of the above into more positive thoughts, try starting with the statements below:

People do...		I will...	
I can...		I am grateful for...	
I do...		I look forward to...	
I am able to...		I feel...	
I have...		Write your own:	

04

Think about Your Life and Your Personal Strengths

Thinking about the things you are grateful for helps to foster a general sense of positivity. Looking back on your life may bring back memories about things you have done in the past that might help you now. Thinking specifically about your achievements, no matter how big or small, can help you to identify your strengths or skills.

What are you grateful for?

Tip: This can be **people, things, or situations** in your life that are good or make you happy.

**If you can't change the situation, can you change how you feel about it?
How might you accomplish that?**

Tip: Think about **tasks you have completed**, people you have helped, skills you have, **difficulties you have overcome**.

What are your positive qualities or skills?

Tip: Think about the words other people would use to describe **your personality**.

In the past, what strategies have you found helpful during difficult situations?

Tip: This could include:
Talking to a friend, going for a walk, praying or meditation.

05

When You Can, Make A Plan!

Take another look at the situations that are preventing you from having the social interactions you want to have. Can you come up with a plan to change any of them?

Remember, you can't change all situations but sometimes just a small change to address your feelings or your thoughts, can make a difference.

Tip: Make use of the skills or the strategies you identified in the previous exercise.

Situation	Plan



Meet Mansur ‘Happy’ Ladhani

Mansur Ladhani is 73 years old. He is very active within his faith group and in the programs organized by their ‘Care for the Elderly’ team. He moved to Canada in 1973 and has regularly visited his place of worship for the past 35-40 years. He actively participates in exercise and yoga programs on a weekly basis, and also attends information sessions organized in partnership with hospitals, government, fire department and more. Mansur has seen new immigrants his age struggle with language, transportation and mobility issues. Mr. Ladhani goes a step above to help other older immigrants by volunteering to translate, offering rides and assisting with grocery shopping. He acknowledges the benefit of running senior’s programs through faith communities as it helps older immigrants feel less lonely, pass the time and keep busy. When speaking of how he personally benefits, he shares, “I feel happy. I like to do it all the time because I am a retired person and I can do whatever I can!”



Look at the faces, which one matches how you are feeling now that you have completed the reflections and have a plan for moving forward?



I do not feel
better



I feel somewhat
better



I feel much
better

Tip: Compare your response on page 3 with your response on page 13.
Was there a difference? Or was it the same?

Remember: It is okay to talk about your loneliness and it is okay to reach out for help if you need it.

See our interactive maps for available resources in your community as well as our Tip Sheet: Staying Socially Connected. The following page is a quick access guide to various community resources.

If you do not have anyone else to talk to, consider calling a telephone helpline. These are support services offered over the telephone. Your call will remain anonymous.

Some examples:

- Halton Seniors Helpline: 1-866-457-8252
- Spectra Helpline (Peel: multilingual services available): 905-459-7777
- Tele-Touch Reassurance Program: 1-800-387-7127

06

Community Resources

Barriers to Social Engagement	Available Community Resources
Grief	Seek out bereavement support, try the Centre for Grief and Healing (Halton & Peel): 905-848-4337 or contact Acclaim Health (Halton): 1-800-387-7127
New Home/ Neighbourhood	Call 2-1-1 or visit www.211ontario.ca for social, health and government services in your neighbourhood. Visit the Halton Community Services Database at www.hipinfo.ca and/or the Peel Community Services Directory at https://peel.cioc.ca for more information on community services in your area.
Health Challenges	Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for free, confidential health advice or Health Care Connect at 1-800-445-1822 for help finding a doctor.
Language	Connect with local settlement agencies for assistance with daily needs, including translation services. Try Halton Multicultural Council (HMC): 905-842-2486 or, Newcomer Centre of Peel: 905-306-0577
Technology	Visit your local library to access computers.
Transportation	Call 3-1-1 for information on the local public transit system, or other transit options in your community. Visit the Halton Community Services Database at www.hipinfo.ca and/or the Peel Community Services Directory at https://peel.cioc.ca for more information on specialized transit services in your area.
Living Alone	Explore using technology to connect with others (Skype, Facetime, Facebook, Wechat, Whatsapp). If you need help, check if your local library has classes.
Lack of Knowledge about Services	Visit your local library and/or faith community, these are good places to get information and meet people. Consider calling 2-1-1 for more information and referrals to community and social services, and/or 3-1-1 for information on municipal programs and services. 2-1-1 and/or 3-1-1 services are free, confidential, multilingual and available 24-hours a day.
Financial Barriers	Call Service Canada at 1-800-622-6232 for information about federal income support programs or Service Ontario at 1-800-267-8097 for information about provincial income support programs.

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Note

This tool was developed by the Centre for Elder Research, Oakville ON, Canada from 2015-19. It is part a 4-year research project called Building Connected Communities: Improving Community Supports to Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation in Immigrants 65+. This project was focused specifically on the experiences of older immigrants in the Regions of Peel and Halton. This tool is not a standardized or validated treatment for loneliness and it is also not a substitute for mental health advice. The inclusion of any agency or service in this tool does not constitute an endorsement of the service.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

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